

Heller Estate, Boathouse (Valhalla Boathouse)
State Highway 89
South Lake Tahoe Vicinity
El Dorado County
California

HABS No. CA-2393-A

HABS
CAL
9-LKTAS.V,
2A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HELLER ESTATE, BOATHOUSE
(VALHALLA BOATHOUSE)

HABS No. CA-2393-A

HABS
CAL
9-LKTAS.V
2A-

Location:

The Heller Estate Boathouse, also referred to as the Valhalla Boathouse, is located within the Tallac National Register Historic Site, Heller Estate Portion, on 8.79 acres of land administered by the United States Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. The entire Tallac National Register Historic Site encompasses 150 acres of land along the southwest shores of Lake Tahoe in the county of El Dorado, California, lying 1 mile north of the city limits of South Lake Tahoe. The property borders State Highway 89 on the west and extending to Tallac Point including the Kiva Picnic Area and the historic ruins of the original commercial resort. The Heller Estate adjoins Camp Richardson Resort on the south. Camp Richardson has been determined to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places, but has not been formally listed.

Present Owner:

Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
870 Emerald Bay Road Suite #1
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Present Occupant:

Same/Tahoe Tallac Association

Present Use:

Recreation/Historic Interpretation/Cultural Arts
National Register Historic Site

Significance:

The significance of the Valhalla Boathouse (the Heller Estate is referred to as "Valhalla", hence the name for the boathouse) is its relationship to other structures at the Tallac Historic Site. The Baldwin, Pope, and Heller Estates were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), completed 1988, designates the 150 acre Tallac Historic Site as part of the 225 acre Special Interest Area emphasizing preservation and interpretation of its historic and natural resources for public enjoyment.

The primary period of significance for the site is from 1880 to 1940, which encompasses ruins of the site's original commercial resort buildings, the construction of new estate properties, and the creation of unique rustic architectural styles that form the main components of today's historic site (district). The significance of the Heller Estate and the Valhalla Boathouse, is in part its significance with the other estates, landscape features, and Lake Tahoe.

Each of the Estates is significant for its association with important events and architectural values, as well as several individuals and families--Baldwin, Tallant, Tevis, Pope, Heller--who were associated with the development of the Estates. Their wealth, influence, and activities contributed to the founding and development of major banking and other financial institutions in California, including the Wells Fargo Bank, American Stock Exchange, and Crocker-Anglo Bank. The estates and their founders are linked to important events in California, the early development of recreation at Lake Tahoe and the subsequent importance of the Lake as a major tourist attraction in North America.

The significance of Tallac Historic Site is reflected in its natural setting and historic landscape. Overall, the intent of the various estate owners appears to have been minimal intervention to the natural setting of the area. The landscape, buildings and structures that comprise the three estates show a remarkable continuity towards natural materials, principally rock and wood. Their setting illustrates the relationship between the natural vegetation, lakeshore, recreation-use areas, staff housing, and the principal residences. The estates were clearly intended for private use and embody a strong sense of ambiance and peace associated with the outdoors and the forest. The estates were also the centers for social activity, recreation, and leisure. The traditions and values of the urban elite were also carried out at Tallac Historic Site, with all the necessities of cultural, philosophical, and culinary fulfillment. In essence the lack of "designed landscapes" at Tallac Site, with the exception of the arboretum, is itself part of the site's significant character and setting.

The first estate home was built by the Tallant family in the early 1890s. The house was purchased by the Tevis family and later by George Pope. At that time the property encompassed the present-day Heller Estate. Other buildings were added to the estate after 1900 including boathouses and numerous guest cottages. It is believed that the first Boathouse built between 1910 and 1913 is the present-day Valhalla Boathouse. The Pope Estate as a complex of buildings reflects the opulent lifestyle of wealthy San Francisco capitalists.

The Heller Estate, which includes "Valhalla" Main House, the Boathouse, Twin Guest Cabins, and a water tower, occupies the general location of a still earlier Tahoe resort hotel, the Cascade House. The estate including all its buildings is important to the unique cultural environment created by the three contiguous Estates. Built in 1924, the main house, Valhalla, reflects two earlier 20th century architectural traditions. The exterior style of the structure combines Shingle Style and Colonial Revival traditions with rustic elements, closely reflecting the refined and genteel style of the main house in the adjacent Pope Estate, constructed almost 30 years earlier. The interior, however, reflects massive and brooding Nordic themes, more in keeping with the period revival modes of the 1920s. While the house is handsome and inviting on the exterior, Valhalla's outstanding architectural values lie in the design, character, and sheer power of its interior statement.

The Valhalla Boathouse is significant both for its contribution to rustic estate architecture, but also for its association with the development of recreation and boating along the shores of Lake Tahoe. The Boathouse is oriented in relationship to Lake Tahoe.

Built at an incline, boats could be lowered from the Boathouse along a railroad track and into the water below. This rather unique system was also employed at the Pope Estate Boathouse, believed to have been built after the Valhalla Boathouse.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The main structure of the Boathouse is believed to have been constructed by the Tevis family, between 1910 and 1913. Hence, the architectural style of the "Pope" Boathouse resembles the architectural style of the Valhalla Boathouse. The interior loft (northern wing), ice house, and skylights are believed to have been added by the Heller family during the 1920s. The loft provided overnight living quarters. The winch, rails, and another apparatus used for moving boats to and from the water, were part of the building's original design.

2. Architect: Unknown, although reported to be an architect named Rankin.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Valhalla Boathouse was owned by the Tevis, Pope, Heller families. Walter Heller was a prominent San Francisco investment banker and a director of Wells Fargo Bank. After the Heller family sold Valhalla it passed through other ownership and was purchased by the South Tahoe Valhalla Corporation in 1965. Six years later, the Corporation negotiated a transfer of the property to the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, the present owner.
4. Builder, contractor, supplier: Unknown.
5. Original plans and construction: None in existence.
6. Alterations and additions: There are no known major structural alterations and additions to the Boathouse outside the period of significance. The northernmost portion of the interior loft was probably added in the 1920s, as was the icehouse and skylights. Its character defining fabric and function are considered significant features of the interior space of the Boathouse. During the last two decades the railroad track that supported the apparatus which lowered boats into the lake was removed. The water heater room is the only obvious addition.

B. Historical Context

What today is known as the Tallac Historic Site has long been a place of summer use. The first known inhabitants were the Washoe, the local Native American culture group who would seasonally travel to Lake Tahoe from Nevada to escape the summer heat of the eastern slope deserts, to fish, to gather berries and other foodstuffs, to collect reeds and fibers for basketry, and to hunt the game animals that also migrated to the area. The area was called "da ow a ga" which meant "edge of the lake." Mispronounced by the white man, it became known as "Tahoe."

The first documented discovery of the lake by Euro-American explorers was by Fremont and Carson in February of 1844. The area remained isolated and undeveloped for the next two decades, until the

discovery of the Comstock silver deposits in Nevada in 1859 brought a wave of settlers from the west through the basin over the wagon road from Placerville to the Carson Valley. For the first time large numbers of people began to see and exploit the lake's many resources, particularly its valuable timber reserves. The Comstock mines were beginning to need lumber to make ties and props on a scale that was unavailable in Nevada but accessible at Tahoe. A logging camp was established on the present site of Camp Richardson and by the mid-1870s logging had spread outward along the lakeshore and small streams which fed the lake.

At the same time, tourism was growing. With the completion of the trans-Sierra railroad in 1869 and improved stage roads from Nevada and California, visitors began to frequent the lake's north and south shores during the summer. In 1873, Ephraim "Yank" Clement constructed the Tallac Point House, an easygoing, rustic hostelry catering to the merchants and miners of the Comstock. By 1880, however, the pendulum of influence began to swing toward San Francisco. E.J. "Lucky" Baldwin, having made a fortune in Nevada silver mining and stock speculation, and San Francisco real estate, foreclosed on Clement's hotel and began the process of land acquisition that would gain him, by 1898, control of all the lakeshore from approximately the present site of Tahoe Keys to Taylor Marsh, west of the present Forest Service Visitor Center and stretching south and including the northernmost half of to Fallen Leaf.

"Lucky" Baldwin's ownership of a major piece of Tahoe shoreline came at the zenith of the historical period that favored the development of opulent resorts. By the turn of the century his Tallac Resort, with two luxurious hotels, a casino and numerous guest cabins and utility buildings, was the premier complex on the lake.

Baldwin, himself, owned large tracts of land in northern and southern California, yet was constantly in debt and was forced to sell his holdings including those at Lake Tahoe. In 1894, Baldwin sold to Tallant a tract of land along the shoreline of Lake Tahoe, long before the decline in popularity of his hotel and casino.

The prosperity of Tallac Resort was not to last. By the end of World War I the wealthy were beginning to spend their money in different ways. It became more fashionable to own private family retreats sheltered from the bustle and noise of the great city. In this way, another era began at Tahoe. Baldwin died in 1909 and his land was subdivided, estates were built by several prosperous Bay Area families and were privately owned and occupied until the mid-1960s. The Tallac resort was torn down in the late-twenties, a victim of environmental concerns, economics and changing fashions.

The first purchaser of resort property in the area was George Tallant. Of the four San Francisco banks established in 1850, Tallant's was the first such institution to continue in any form to recent years known as the Crocker Bank. Later Tallant sold the property to Lloyd Tevis, a socially prominent San Francisco millionaire, and director of the Wells Fargo Bank. The Tevis family constructed most of the buildings now known as the Pope Estate - an excellent example of early Lake Tahoe quasi-elegant/rustic vacation architecture. The Tevis family continued to control the Lake Tahoe estate until 1913, after which the estate was in receivership for nearly 6 years, finally purchased in the 1920s by the Pope family.

The new owner was one of California's leading businessmen, George A. Pope of San Francisco, the chairman of the Board of Pope and Talbot, one of the largest lumbering empires on the Pacific coast privately owned and continuously operated. The estate became known as the Vatican Lodge in reference to the family surname of Pope. The Forest Service acquired the property in 1965.

In 1924 a portion of the Pope Estate was sold to Walter Heller, a prominent San Francisco investment broker and director of the Wells Fargo Bank. The Heller's constructed a large home they named Valhalla, after the great hall of Viking lore. Valhalla changed hands a number of times and was eventually purchased by the federal government in the early 1970s.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Valhalla Boathouse is a 1 1/2 story Gambrel style building, erected in a trapezoidal shape in order to provide an oblique angle to the lakeshore to allow vessels to access the two wide swinging doors on the north elevation of the building. The building's significance lies not only in its architectural design and unique cedar bark exterior siding, but also its function as an early-day maritime feature along the shores of Lake Tahoe, and its relationship to surrounding buildings.
2. Condition of fabric: Both the exterior and interior of the boathouse are in good condition. The exterior bark siding is in good condition. The roof has been re-shingled in recent years. The building is in relatively sound condition given its age, but it will require periodic maintenance. The structural support of the building is pulling away from the sidewalls in one area and will eventually have to be corrected.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building's floor plan is actually trapezoidal in shape because one sidewall is longer than the other so that the wall and doors on the beach (north) side are parallel to the beach and lakefront, but not at right angles to the sidewalls. The building is 30' wide, and one sidewall is 79'4" long and the other is 87' long. There is an attached 4' x 6' shed with a gable roof on the north side of the building which was originally a pump room but now houses a non-functioning water heater. There is a loft inside of the south end of the building which projects 28 feet northerly into the building. There is a wooden ice-house structure which was added inside the north-east corner of the boathouse at some time in the past. It measures roughly 8' wide by 16' long, and has a flat ceiling roughly 10' above the floor.
2. Foundation: The Boathouse sits on a stepped and battered perimeter concrete foundation with a partial slab floor. This foundation appears to be original.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are clad with solid vertical slabs of incense cedar bark, which are nailed through to horizontal sheathing applied over 2" x 6" studs.
4. Structural systems, framing: The gambrel shaped building has a cantilever, open-truss exposed framing system.
 - a. Floor: The floor is partially dirt, and partially concrete slab on-grade. The entire floor slopes gently downward from south to north towards the lake.
 - b. Walls: The walls are full dimension 2" x 6" studs at 24" on center.
 - c. Roof: The roof system is a gambrel design and is framed at 24" on center with wood trusses consisting of three truss elements. The upper slope pitched roof is formed by a Howe truss. Two simple trusses form the gambrel's steep sides and connect at the ridge point.

These truss lap chords are spaced 24" on center which aligns them with the wall studding. A knee brace connects the boom chord at the simple trusses with the stud walls.
 - d. Dormers: Four shed-roof dormers are cut into the steep slope portion of the roof in the mezzanine area. The truss chords have been altered to allow for headroom in the dormers at the loft.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: None
6. Chimneys: None.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is a pair of tall hinged "dutch" doors on the beachfront (north-side) with a total opening width of 13'6" and a total height of 19'6". The lower leaves are 11' tall. The top 4' of the hinged side of each upper leaf is sloped to match the gambrel roof slope. There are bi-parting sliding doors on the inland (south-side) with a total width of 7'6" wide and a height of roughly 6'0". A hinged door was added in the past on the east side of the

building for access to the interior stairs to the loft, which was also a later addition.

- b. Windows and shutters: There are windows along the east and west elevation of the boathouse which have diamond-pattern muntins. Not all of these windows are intact and they have all been boarded over. There are dormer windows in the loft with rectangular-pattern muntins. These dormers and windows were likely added when the the loft was built. There is an original diamond-pattern muntined double casement window in the south end of the building which is presently boarded over but can be seen from the inside of the loft.

There are no shutters on any of the building's windows.

- 8. Roof: The roof shape is a gambrel design, and was resingled just a few years ago. The roof also has glass skylights which are glazed, set in metal frames and placed along the the steep portion of the roof. The skylights were added in 1988 and replicated the general appearance of the original skylights which had a slightly different design.

- a. Shape, covering: Gambrel roof with standard cedar shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed cornices with minimal eave overhang.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Four shed-roof dormers are cut into the steep slope portion of the roof in the mezzanine area. The truss chords have been altered to allow for headroom in the dormers at the loft.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor Plan: Open, trapezoidal plan.
- 2. Stairways: A stairway was built as part of the loft addition. It is an open stairway with a pipe railing and has no ornamental detail.

3. Flooring: The floor of the interior slopes downward towards the lakeshore (north-side) at about a 5 degree slope. It is part dirt and part concrete slab.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls in the boathouse are exposed wood studs above the exposed concrete foundation walls. The ceiling is notable for its exposed roof trusses. The inside face of the wall and rough-sawn board sheathing is exposed. The loft walls are clad with celotex panels, and wood paneling (shiplap and tongue and groove). The celotex panels have been painted white with 1" x 12" battens to cover the joints.
 5. Door and window openings: Refer to description of the interior features. The interior doors in the loft are painted stile and rail doors with four horizontal flat panels.
 6. Decorative features and trim: None.
 7. Hardware: No notable intact hardware. Original hoist, and rails were removed years ago.
 8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, ventilating, air conditioning: None.
 - b. Lighting: None.
 - c. Plumbing: A toilet and sink were added when the loft addition was built. A gas-fired water heater was added in the attached shed on the north side apparently to serve the loft.
 - d. Winch
 9. Original Furnishings: None existing.
- D. Site:
1. General Setting: The Tallac Historic site is located on the southwest shore of Lake Tahoe in northeastern California. The area immediately surrounding the Valhalla Boathouse includes many large conifers and native shrubs and grasses, especially near the lakeshore (photos 1, 3, 6). The basin, within which the lake rests, is surrounded by the Sierra Nevada mountains on the west and the Carson Range on the east. The lake itself is divided between two states--California and Nevada. The area is centrally

located between Sacramento, California, and Reno, Nevada.

The 74 acres known as the estates portion of the Tallac Historic Site is bounded on the north by Lake Tahoe, on the south by Highway 89, on the east by Camp Richardson and on the west by the Kiva Picnic Area. This area is part of the larger 150 acre Tallac Historic Site and 225 acre Special Interest Area, which includes the Lake Tahoe Visitor Center, the Kiva Picnic Area, and Tallac Point. The site is located in the state of California, in the county of El Dorado. The boundaries of the National Register Site are same as above with the west boundary at Kiva Point.

2. Historic landscape design: The historic landscape of the Estates can be classified as a combination of a designed and native landscape. The landscape is a composite of native flora, introduced species, lawns, pathways, fences, outdoor furniture, walls, fences, etc. Estate owners during the early twentieth century sought to embellish the native species with exotic plants and shrubs. The Pope Estate exhibits the most highly designed historic landscape consisting of a pond, waterfall, gazebo, concrete bridge, and fence. The landscape may have been an attempt to mimic landscapes found in the Bay Area, possibly at Golden Gate Park. The Heller Estate has minimal landscaping and the lawns that exist today were introduced in recent years. Whatever the case, the landscape survives to this day and evokes a rustic feeling as do the buildings nearby the landscape. In some cases remnants of the historic landscapes can be seen mixed with the modern landscape, which includes annual grasses, exotic flowers, and bicycle paths. Lawns and garden paths were built to and from each building and down to the waterfront, providing safe and easy access for the owners and their guests.

The historic landscape of the Estates has changed little since the abandonment of the area by its owners in the 1950s. Large conifers around the various buildings were left intact by the Estates' nineteenth century owners, and if not for disease and beetle infestation most would still be standing today. Young trees were probably regularly cleared, as historic photographs depict a more open expansive lakeview than today. Trees and shrubs along the lakeshore were

probably also cleared to permit better viewing of the lake. In general existing historic landscape features are in good condition.

3. Outbuildings: None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: see attached.
- B. Historic views: None.
- C. Interviews: Interviews were conducted with three Washoe women about their recollections regarding the Valhalla Boathouse. All three women are direct descendants of Ben and Maggie Mayo James whose family occupied the loft apartment in the Boathouse. Ben James worked as a caretaker for Walter Heller for many years and from the interviews it appears that that position was handed down through the family for some time.

The first interview was conducted on May 21, 1992 with the James' granddaughter, Margie Washoe George. Born in 1913, George spent summers and one winter with the James' at Lake Tahoe and in the Boathouse.

The second interview was conducted on September 28, 1993 with Ramona George Dick, Margie Washoe George's daughter. Dick was raised by her aunt and uncle, Mabel and Ray Fillmore, who had taken over the caretaker's position in the 1930's

The third interview was conducted on September 29, 1993 with Mabel Richard James who lived in the Boathouse for a time with her uncles Roma and Roy James.

The first two interviews were conducted by JoAnne Peden, the third by Helen Blue.

- D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Supernowicz, Dana. Tallac Historic Sites Structures Report. Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, South Lake Tahoe, 1991

USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Management Unit.
Final Environmental Impact Statement: Tallac
Historic Site Master Plan. South Lake Tahoe,
1994.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Goodrich, Donald H. Factual Data Report Camp
Richardson Exchange. Prepared for United States Forest
Service, June 1, 1962.

Peterson, Dan. South Lake Tahoe Historic Estates Cost
Estimate-Contract #53-9158-6167. May 15, 1979.

USDA, Forest Service. South Lake Tahoe Estate Complex
Building Retention and Removal Plan, Lake Valley Ranger
District, Eldorado National Forest. Prepared by
Elliott Graham, Biological Information Officer,
December 5, 1972.

USDA, Forest Service. South Lake Tahoe
Estates-Historical Research, Contract No. 39-4696.
Prepared by Nevada Historical Society, June, 1974.

USDA, Forest Service. (Draft) Supplemental
Environmental Assessment to the "Alternative Plans for
Public Use of McGonagle, Pope, and Heller Estates, Lake
Tahoe Management Unit, Environmental Analysis and
Record of Decision 1980". Prepared by Dena L. Schwarte
and Jon Hoefer, September 1991.

USDA, Forest Service. Survey of Vahalla, Pope, and
McGonagle Estates, Lake Tahoe, Eldorado National
Forest. n.d.

USDA, Forest Service. Tallac Historic Site/Estates
Operations and Maintenance Plan. Prepared by Lyn
Barnett, September 5, 1983.

USDA, Forest Service. Tallac Historic Site Master Plan,
Estates Portion. Prepared by Lake Tahoe Basin
Management Unit in cooperation with the Tahoe-Tallac
Association. 1989.

USDI, National Park Service. National Register of
Historic Places, Inventory-Nomination Form for Heller
Estate, Pope Estate, and Baldwin Estate. Prepared by
Paula Bogosian, June 1978.

- E. Likely sources not yet investigated: Interviews with past owners of the Heller Estate.
- F. Supplemental material: None

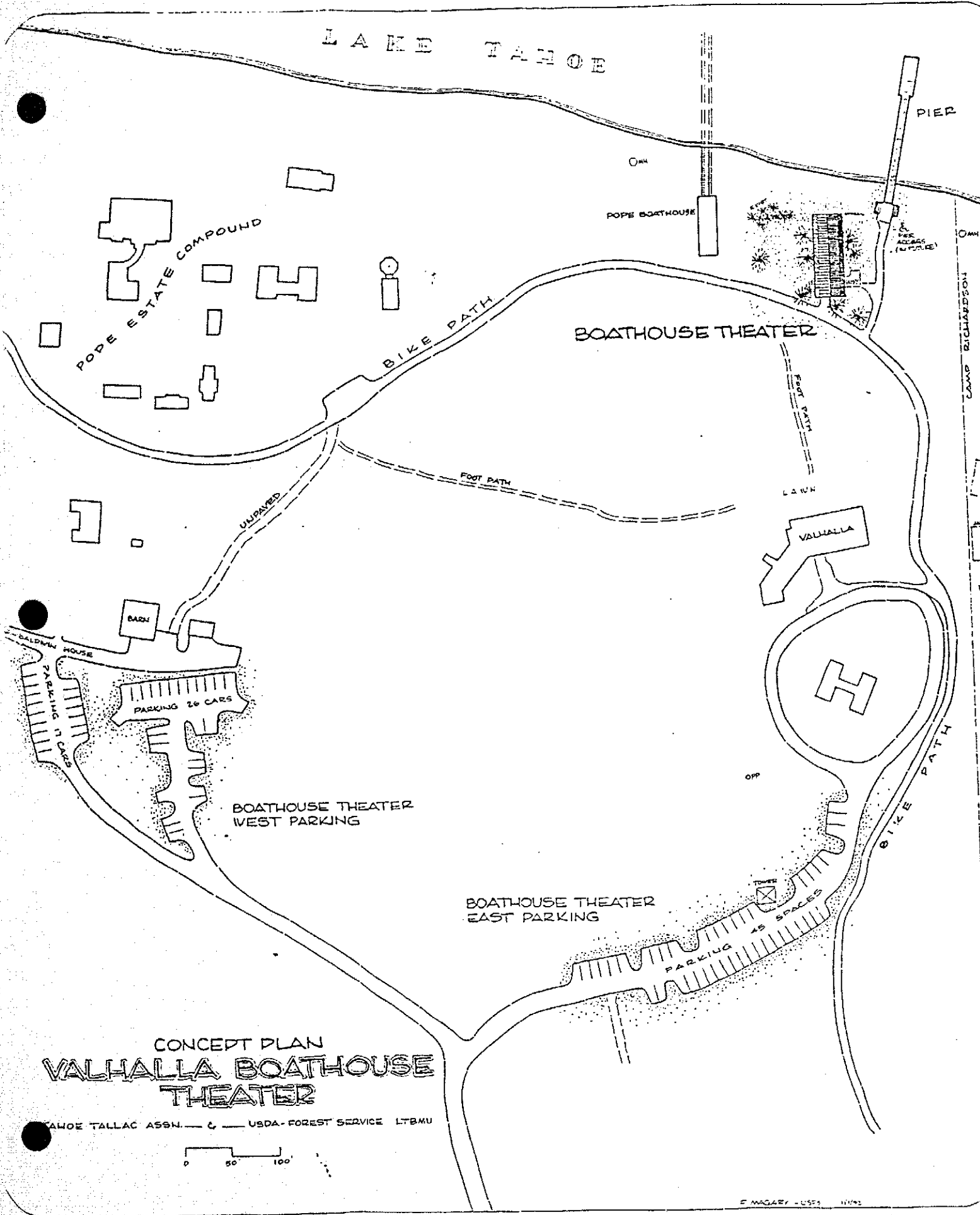
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

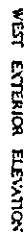
This documentation was prepared to mitigate the effects of a historic building conversion project which requires extensive remodeling of the interior of the boathouse to accomodate a community theater-playhouse. The proposed changes to the interior of the Boathouse constituted an adverse effect. The Forest Service, State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO), and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) have entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). One of the stipulations was to conduct a HABS report prior to commencement of any work on the Boathouse.

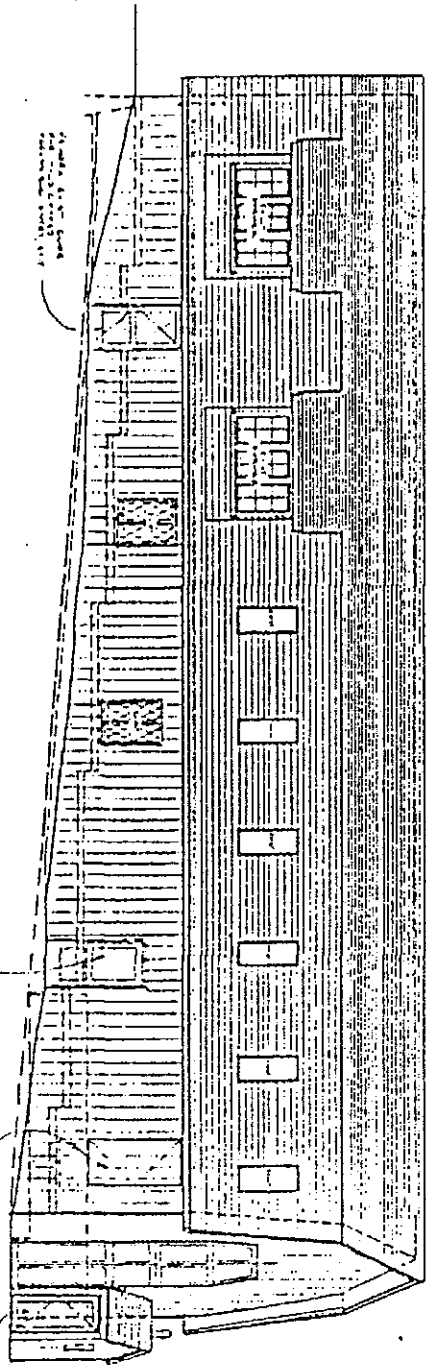
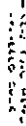
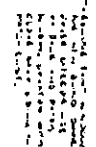
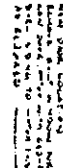
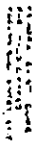
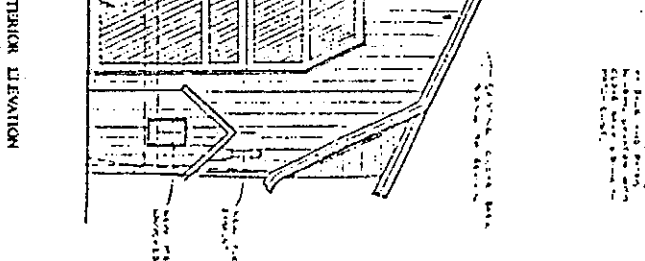
Prepared By: Dana E. Supernowicz
Title: Zone Historian, R5
Affiliation: Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
Date: January 22, 1994
With Assistance From: Linda Cole, Tallac Historic Site
Director/Curator;

Ken Kurtzman, Kurtzman Associates, Architects and Planners,
Ghiradelli Square, Cocoa Building 900 North Point, Suite
430, San Francisco, CA 94109;

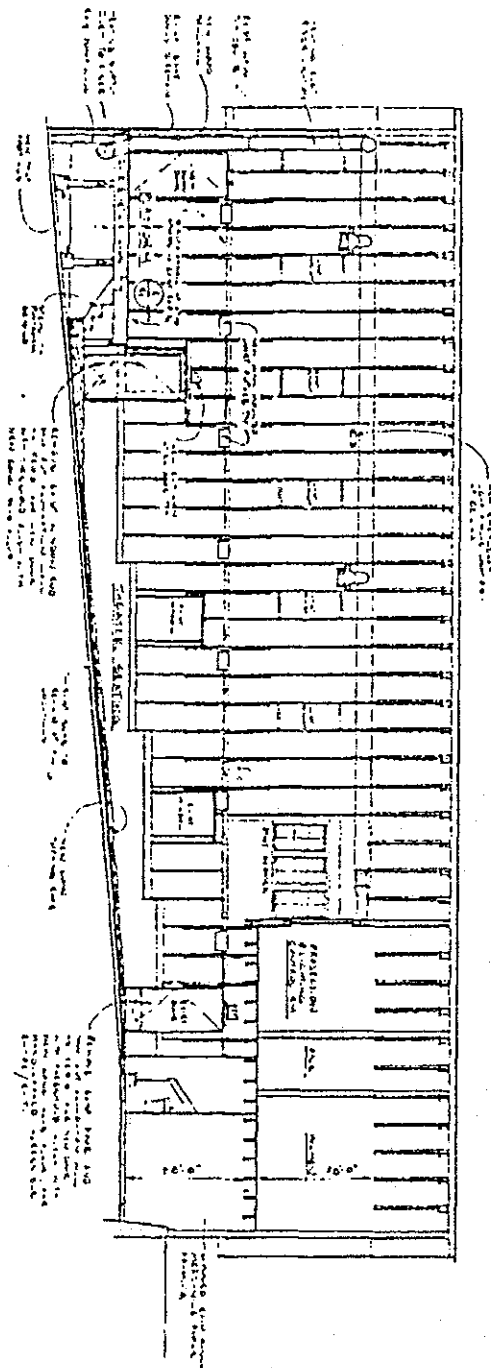
David Byrd, Historian, Eldorado National Forest, 100 Forni
Road, Placerville, CA 95667.



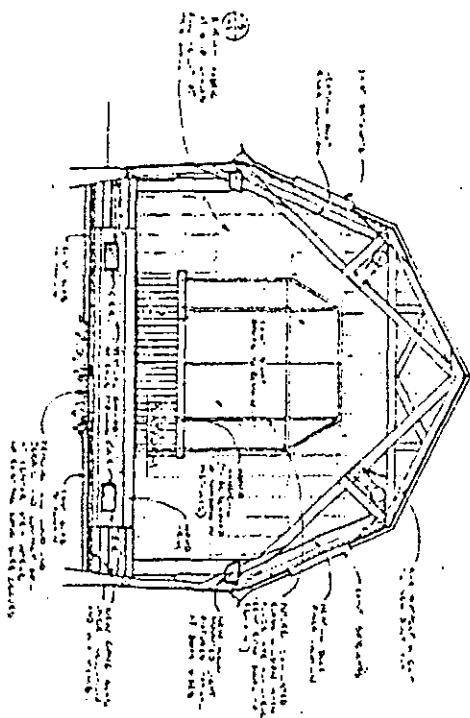
[illegible]

[illegible]

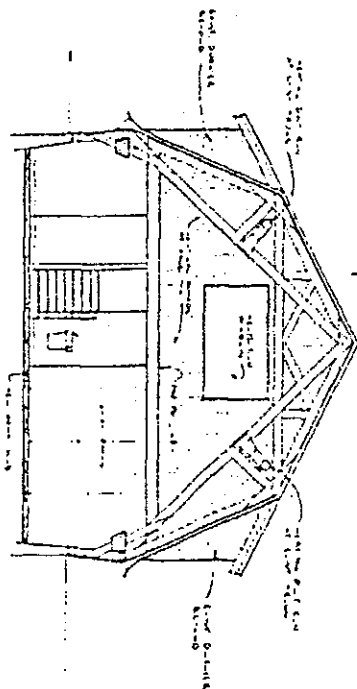
SECTION - A (EAST)



SECTION - B (NORTH)



SECTION - C (SOLUTION)



VALHALLA BOATHOUSE THEATER
• • TALLAC HISTORIC SITE • •
SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, CALIFORNIA

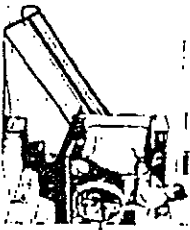
SECTIONS

PROPOSED INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS

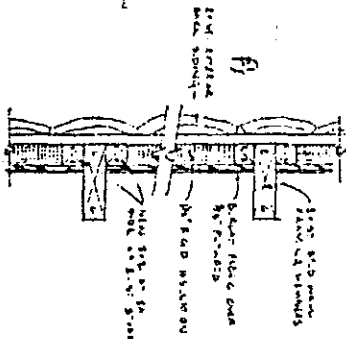
Arbiters and Planners
 Gary - 1991 - 1-6-92
 Bob - 1991 - 1-6-92
 Bob - 1991 - 1-6-92
 Bob - 1991 - 1-6-92

67-1038

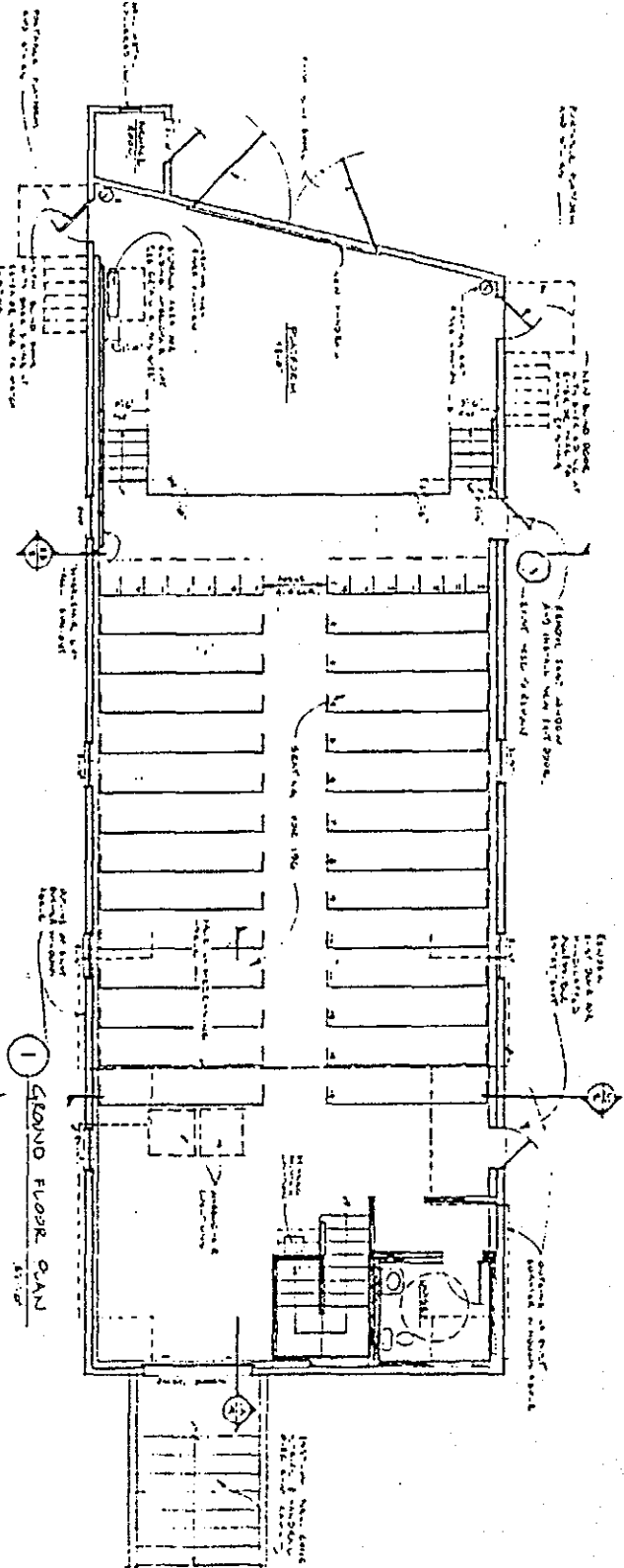
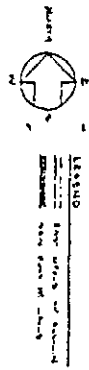
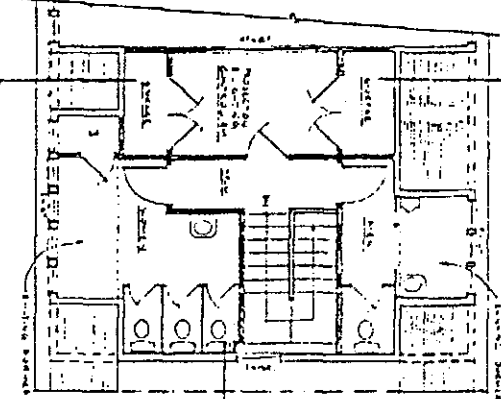
4 GLIDING WHEELCHAIR LIFT



3 INTERIOR WALL DETAIL



2 MEZZANINE PLAN



1 GROUND FLOOR PLAN

VALHALLA BOATHOUSE THEATER
TALLAC HISTORIC SITE
SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, CALIFORNIA

FLOOR PLANS
PROPOSED INTERNAL
IMPROVEMENTS

As shown and shown
on the drawings
and on the site
visit.

19